S: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1948) 1949 FT7 Yao FT7

ship. The difficulties of his position are brought home to the neophyte village headman in speeches made by old and experienced men. On one such occasion I heard a man say, 'Some men who marry into a village are bad and can split a village like this one by telling lies to the headman, saying that his sisters are talking behind his back and are insulting him. When a headman hears all this he might break his village by ill-treating his relatives, thus causing himself to be left all alone.' In this way the headman's responsibility for maintaining harmonious relations between the members of the village and himself is emphasized. His failure to do so results in what they call a break in the village—the departure of some of the members to live elsewhere—which is a severe blow to the status of the headman. In fact, he is dependent on his dependants for status, and the Yao are quick to point this out to neophyte headmen, saying, 'A tree cannot grow without branches.'

We can better understand the situation if we consider the social structure of the Yao village a little more closely. The Yao are a matrilineal people and are dominantly matrilocal. They live in small groups of huts scattered fairly evenly over the country and from a few hundred yards to possibly a mile or so apart. Such clusters may contain as few as five or as many as sixty or more huts, occupied by between 20 and 200 people.

These people are almost always kinsfolk, and in the smaller villages they are usually all either matrilineal descendants of a common ancestress or their spouses. In the larger groups there is a more complex situation which I shall analyse below. In the simpler groups there may be no male matrilineal descendant in the village and the leadership of the group is taken over by a senior female descendant of the founder of the village. Usually, however, if the group is large, one of the male matrilineal descendants lives patrilocally in the village and assumes leadership.

The relationship between a male matrilineal descendant and the female matrilineal descendants who are in his charge is signified by the word '*mbumba*'. The word particularly refers to the relationship between a man and his sisters and I have therefore translated it as 'sorority-group'. It includes a man's full sisters, matrilineal female collaterals (whom he calls sisters), their female children, and the female children of those female children, and so on. It is usually used in the sense of 'somebody's sorority-group'. A man belonging to the descent-group of the sorority-group may refer to these women as 'our sorority-group'. The man who is in charge of the sorority-group is referred to as the *ayaw mbumba*. This could be translated as 'owner of the sorority-group' but because of the property associations with the word 'owner' in our language, I have instead translated this as 'warden of the sorority-group' which expresses more accurately the relationship between a man and his female relatives. Even in those groups where there is a female in charge of the village and no male matrilineal descendant is resident in the group, there is usually some one man, possibly married in some other village, who is warden of the sorority-group. The warden of a sorority-group has certain precise duties to perform on behalf of his charges. First, he is concerned with the good relations between members of the sorority-group and with other such groups. He has to settle most of the domestic quarrels that take place between members of the sorority-groups. Second, and this is considered to be a most important function, he is the person who is the

marriage-surety for the marriages of the members of the group. Briefly this means that he must be approached before a marriage can be legally contracted by any member of his charge, he or his representative is present at the ceremony which formally announces the marriage, and he is responsible for the behaviour of his female relative in that marriage. Third, he is immediately concerned with the physical welfare and health of his sorority-group. He must track down the sorcerers causing their illnesses and supply the medicine to heal them. He has to arrange for the ritual purification of mourners after the death of one of the sorority-group's members. Fourth, he must be present in the court-house if one of his charges is involved in a case and he is usually looked to for the money for the fine. I have known a case not to begin because the warden of the sorority-group was not present. Frequently if the husbands of the female members of his charge default, he has to provide the hut-tax money.

Usually the warden of the sorority-group is the eldest brother of a group of adult full sisters. The younger brothers of the group of sisters, while concerned with their welfare, do not stand in this particular responsible position. They refer to the sorority-group as ' our sorority-group '. The elder brother refers to the sorority-group, be it noted, as ' my sorority-group ', and this sets him over and against his younger brothers. The position that the warden holds, however, is not rigidly fixed, for a younger brother may assume control of the sorority-group if for some reason he is dissatisfied with the way in which affairs are being conducted, and is able so to assert himself.

If we recall that the status of a man in a Yao community is determined by the number of dependants that he can command, it is easy to see that relationships between an elder brother and his younger brother are distinctive. The elder brother is responsible for the actions of his younger brother in much the same way as he is for one of his sorority-group, and the younger brothers have a great emotional attachment to their older brothers. Yet at the same time the elder brother stands in the way of the younger brother in his striving for status, in that while the elder brother is warden of the sorority-group the younger brother cannot be, and therefore cannot have dependants and status. It is not surprising to find that accusations of sorcery are frequently made between brothers and the result often is that the younger brother takes the sorority-group away from his sorcerer brother to some other place and sets up a new village with it. Therefore, one possible source of instability in a Yao village lies in the operation of the kinship system in a system of values which reckons status by adherents.

I have thus far been describing the simpler types of village. In the larger groups it is common for the warden of the sorority-group to live in the village where his sorority-group is. Then he usually brings one (or sometimes more) of his wives to the village, where she lives patrilocally. The daughters that are born to her do not return to the sorority-group from which the headman's wife came but marry and set up households near their mother in the village of their father. Thus there develops in time a second sorority-group in the village, alongside the first sorority-group, and related to it through the headman. At this point we may say that the man's position has changed from that of headman of a village containing a single sorority-group, to the more complicated and less secure one of village headman over a more hetero-

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M 602 621 BUT IF INTACT, VILLAGE LIFE USED TO BE ORGANIZED on a kinship basis, how far, you may ask, is it still so organized? Very largely. Cross-cousin marriage may be dying out and the bigger homesteads inclining to split up, but society is still fundamentally matrilineal and matilocal. One or two examples will show in what ways it is changing and in what ways it is fairly stable.

Y 592 Y [595] I. An old Yao friend of mine, X, who died three years ago was the grand-mother (*ambuyu*) of Y, a village of 13 huts divided in two by a government-built road. Her father was a polygamist; her husband, (dead before I knew her), had had two other wives in nearby villages; when some 12 to 15 years ago she and her family, (*mbumba*), moved here, parts of it broke away, leaving her with a much smaller homestead than that in which she grew up. Besides the abandoned hut of my dead friend X, are those of a sister, two daughters and their husbands, six nieces (the daughters of three different sisters) and their husbands, a widowed step-brother, a step-son who has brought his wife to his home probably because her brother married his sister and so lives at Y, and a "boys' hut", (really a kitchen too), in which sleep or slept the bigger sons of one of her nieces.

M 592 N [590] [193] M [596] [601] II. A Nyanja friend, A, five or six years ago was allowed by his parents-in-law to take his wife back to his home village. Here, therefore, contrary to matrilocal custom, he lives with his own parents; but the rest of the homestead is matrilocal. When A built his hut here there were four other huts: his parents; those of a younger sister of his mother, (*mai mamg'ono*, "little mother"), and her husband; a girl cousin, this aunt's daughter and so called by him "sister" (*chemwali*), and his only married sister. It is still a small homestead, though another sister has since married and her husband built a hut here, and his young unmarried brothers have built their own "bachelors' hut", (*nyumamba*) where they sleep with one of his nephews; it can never be large, since his parents had eight sons, who as they grow up and marry go off to their wives' homes, and only two daughters to bring them sons-